

# **SEATTLE DOWNTOWN PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES TASK FORCE**

## **TASK FORCE MEETING #13 SUMMARY: OCTOBER 14, 2005**

### **Task Force Members**

Ken Bounds, Co-chair  
Kate Joncas, Co-chair  
Catherine Stanford, Co-chair  
Bruce Bentley  
David Brewster  
B.J. Brooks  
Tina Bueche  
Jordan Royer  
Ron Sher (absent)

### **Guest**

City Councilmember David Della

### **Parks & Rec/MID Staff**

Greg Bucasas  
Cheryl Frasier  
Eric Friedli  
Phuong Nguyen  
Victoria Schoenburg  
Peggy Sullivan  
Christopher Williams  
Anita Woo

### **Consultants**

Bonnie Berk  
Michael Regnier

## **Welcome and Overview**

Ken Bounds opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Bonnie Berk reviewed the meeting agenda.

## **Downtown Parks Management Options and Recommendations**

Bonnie explained that the Co-Chairs met during the last week, and would present their concepts for a management structure for downtown parks (see attached summary).

Ken presented the management concepts:

Initial observations:

- Downtown parks are different—with more intense use and use by office workers and visitors as well as residents—although still part of a city-wide system. The current management structure doesn't fit that reality.
- Many City resources are focused on downtown parks, but they aren't organized in that way.

Three big ideas:

- Reorganize the Parks Department to add a new division—comparable to the Sand Point Division—for downtown parks.
- Contract with the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) to serve as a “master concessionaire” for downtown parks in charge of programming, events and advisory groups.
- Establish an Advisory Board representing different interests, focused on livability and coordination.

There is still much to be figured out, including what sort of security presence should be added and where it should come from. The Parks Board will also play a role, to provide citywide perspective.

Kate Joncas commented further:

These concepts reflect my experience.

- The DSA and MID have benefited from strong neighborhood connections.
- An independent organization balanced by an advisory board has been a good mix at the DSA/MID.
- DSA has also hosted an Urban Mobility Group staffer in its offices without compromising that person's neutral position, and the same could happen with a Parks employee.

The management of downtown parks should respect both public and private interests:

- As public assets, downtown parks need to keep labor unions involved, respect First Amendment rights, and be available for city-wide uses.
- The private sector is prepared to provide resources for downtown parks, and will expect some say over how those resources are used.

The Task Force discussed several aspects of the management concepts:

### **Coordination**

- Two of the keys to Parks' success at Sand Point were 1) the clear guidelines provided by the mayor and city council, to which Parks can refer when a dispute arises, and 2) the considerable autonomy of management; not every decision must be reviewed by an advisory committee, and the Superintendent can contract for up to five years without Council approval.
- One of our goals was to streamline the process of bringing activity to the parks. I worry this management structure would add more bureaucracy.
  - The master concessionaire would set certain parameters (e.g. related to the First Amendment, and communications) but would be free to subcontract various functions.
  - Independent event proposals would still go through the Special Events Committee, but only if they exceeded a specified threshold.
  - Isn't this adding another layer, though?
  - No, the Master Concessionaire would stand in for Parks. There is an analogy to the Parks Department's method of scheduling youth soccer games through Seattle Youth Soccer: that organization schedules individual games, while Parks simply makes sure the fields are being paid for and used.
  - Where other City regulations are involved, there would be an extra layer of organization, but it would be designed to speed progress rather than slow it. Where the Parks permitting office now plays a passive role, the new structure would be proactive and customer service-focused. An analogy here is to the Urban Mobility Group's front-line staffer, who negotiates the red tape on behalf of customers.
- Suppose the friends of a downtown park have an idea, e.g. offering dance classes in Freeway Park. Would that require approval by the master concessionaire? We need to preserve some room for local inventiveness.
  - The master concessionaire would have a coordinative role – in that case, to alert the Freeway Park group about possible conflicts or cross-promotional opportunities.
- So there is a mayor's representative, a Parks contact and a DSA person. We need to be clear about who would be the go-to person.

- If South Lake Union Park is included, this will mean an expansion of DSA's traditional scope.
- The proposed parks liaison in the mayor's office is needed, as someone with authority to address parks issues that involve other City departments.
- Parks Board involvement is a good idea; that body has been effective at oversight of golf, Sand Point, etc. and provides a citywide perspective.
- The Advisory Board should include representatives of youth and tourist interests.
- From a downtown neighborhoods perspective, this structure is very exciting. The advisory group will need to be balanced, with local neighborhood representation as well as subject matter expertise.
  - It would be a mistake to rely on existing organizations for neighborhood representation; they do not necessarily reach the majority of downtown workers and residents.
  - I agree. When an organized group of residents was opposing a project at Northgate, the mayor's postcard survey found that the majority was not opposed. We need to reach the majority in downtown.

### **Security**

- Security need not be police, but it's important to have a uniformed City presence in the parks.
- I very much support a Park Ranger idea. Another way to increase the "eyes and ears" on the parks is through vendors, which Parks could encourage by waiving vendor fees or even subsidizing.
- Where did the Park Ranger concept come from?
  - The Operations Subcommittee found that good parks systems spend more on security, often through Ranger programs. For example, 22 law enforcement officers are dedicated to Nashville Parks, which are half the size of Seattle's.
- What role is envisioned for Park Rangers?
  - Rangers would have less enforcement authority than police officers, but would be uniformed.
  - As a positive presence in the parks, providing information about plans and recreational opportunities as well as assertively enforcing the code of conduct, they could reflect very well on the Department – but that may not be possible.
  - An "ambassador" role would be different than an enforcement role.
    - Why? Rangers play both in the National Parks.
  - Enforcement should be the Rangers' first priority. Rangers will need power for more than calling 911, and they should be a dedicated group with high hiring and training standards. They should not be interchangeable with MID ambassadors.
  - Rangers should have power to enforce the Parks Exclusion Ordinance.
- We need to figure out what sort of budget is possible, and what are the labor issues.
  - Labor representative John Masterjohn is unsure, and doesn't want to raise conflict with the police union. But Parks should be able to define the Ranger jobs as customer service positions.
- Should Rangers be employed by Parks or DSA?
  - This will be an upfront decision. It would be very difficult to move the Rangers from one organization to another.
  - There is a legal question here; Rangers may need to be Parks employees to have City powers.

Christopher Williams agreed return with an issue paper on the subject of Park Rangers, the Cal Anderson Park Code of Conduct, and the summary of security models.

### **Strategy**

- An outreach process will start next year, kicked off by an Open House (time and date TBD, not after Thanksgiving).
- Potential outreach tools: postcards, destination web site
- We should get the mayor and City Council on board before going to the public, through candid internal conversations in the Fall.
  - Educating and informing are good activities, but we should not give the public the impression a decision has been made.
  - One method is to label the report a draft when approaching the public.
- The outreach process could involve hosted public meetings and separate briefings for downtown organizations and the Seattle Parks Board, followed by more involvement by the Task Force. Parks has assigned Kevin Bergsrud to staff the Open House.
- A detailed strategy for these steps, and how to tie them into the 2006-07 budget process, will be presented at the next meeting.
- The outreach process needs to be convenient for downtown workers and residents. Meetings should be conveniently located and at varied times on weekends as well as weekdays.
- Marketing ideas:
  - “Downtown Parks Renaissance” with “R” buttons
  - “A call to action”
  - “Downtown *Perks*”: a park is a perk of living downtown
  - Use public meetings to recruit and build support
- Possible points to make in the report:
  - Not just a “plan to plan”
  - Want to *triple* the activity in downtown parks
  - New sources of money, including private money, is being tapped
  - There is a new set of distinctions and priorities (destination parks, neighborhood parks, beauty spots), and Parks will save money in some to apply to others, and be smart about phasing
  - Safety is a major theme, and the Park Rangers a major proposal
  - Each park has a personality to focus attention, involvement and programming
  - Along with new public money is new efficiencies in the use of public money, e.g. security cost savings from beauty spot strategy
  - Changes are already underway
    - Occidental Park
    - Freeway Park
    - Success of “beauty spot” strategy at the McGraw statue
- Political and legislative work, including budgeting, should happen concurrently with report-writing and public outreach.
  - Ordinance changes will be needed to promote vending and economic activity in downtown parks.
  - It will be important to understand the connection with the Center City Strategy.
  - Councilmember Della: Where legislative changes are necessary, the Council wants to be a partner. We need parks and open spaces downtown, and the Council has a particular concern about public safety in downtown Parks – although we must remember they are part of a citywide system. I appreciate your work.

## **Open Space Discussion and Recommendations, Continued**

Kate distributed a list of privately-owned spaces that she verified as having obligations to provide public open space from height-bonus agreements with the Department of Planning & Development. She agreed to work with the City to develop a friendly and firm letter to alert these spaces' owners of their responsibilities, and to investigate signage requirements.

Tina questioned whether the larger list was accurate; Key Tower, the King County Courthouse and possible spaces in the International District and around Qwest Field should be checked.

David commented:

- Parks should consider any available opportunities to turn streets into parks or open spaces, even if only a lane or two for a half block, or a dead end, particularly somewhere like Belltown where parks are scarce and property very expensive.
- Buildings in violation should be pressured to open up. Parks could even offer to help with chairs and tables.

## **Next Meetings**

Friday, Oct. 28	8:00 a.m.
Friday, November 18	8:00 a.m.
Celebration	TBD

Downtown Parks and Open Space Management Concepts  
Presented for Discussion on October 14, 2005

It starts with the Vision...

*Downtown Parks will be green, beautiful, vibrant, interesting places that are fully used by people in Seattle.*

The Task Force Report will make key recommendations...

*It will take new partnership and actions to realize the vision. Success requires that the larger City Center communities come together to support a revitalized parks network downtown. Here's how:*

**Quick Start Steps (Year One)**

The Task Force will ask the mayor to appoint a go-to person in his office for Parks, to be charged with parks security, planning and advocacy, and act as a liaison with the City Center community.

The Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) will hire an entrepreneurially-oriented person to be charged with working with the City; coordinating programming and events to make the parks more vibrant and active; leading the community outreach effort; building awareness of downtown parks; attracting volunteers; and building a resource base for the changes recommend in the Task Force's report.

The mayor should establish an Advisory Board for Creating a Livable Downtown, with appointed members representing the following:

- District Councils
- Associated Recreation Council (?)
- Seattle Parks Foundation
- Key business organizations
- Advocacy groups (?)
- Others?

**After the First Year**

Parks Department changes:

- Formation of downtown Parks group with a Division-level leader (2007-08)
- Clear point of contact for downtown parks issues
- Enhanced security through a lead "non-commissioned officer" to liase with the MID, Seattle Police, others

Parks Board action:

- Contract with an organization for managing City Center activities and events, responsible for programming, activating the parks; establishing fees for certain activities, etc.

Outcome: Consistent downtown marketing and events strategy for the parks

DSA commitment and capacity building: Fundraising, work with advocacy groups, build consensus, work on park-by-park implementation plan